

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL COUNSEL
Division of Operations-Management

MEMORANDUM OM 03-95 (REVISED)¹

December 4, 2003

To: All Regional Directors, Officers-In-Charge,
and Resident Officers

From: Richard A. Siegel, Associate General Counsel

Subject: Government Travel Charge Card – Q's and A's

Attached, please find in a Question and Answer format, answers to frequently asked questions about the appropriate use of the Government travel charge card. The document is not intended to address all issues that may arise when using the Government travel charge card and is not intended to supercede any prior instructions concerning the use of the Government travel charge card. Any questions should be addressed to your AGC or Deputy or directly with the Finance Branch.

/s/
R.A.S.

Attachment

cc: NLRBU

¹ This revised OM supercedes the version of OM 03-95 that issued on July 15, 2003. Revisions on the attached "Questions and Answers" section are: (1) the addition of footnote 3 and (2) revisions to the answer to Question 15.

USE OF THE GOVERNMENT TRAVEL CHARGE CARD QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Public Law 105-264, dated October 19, 1998, required that Federal employees, traveling on official government business, use the Government contractor-issued travel charge card, when practical, for expenses incurred. When employees use the contractor-issued charge card, the NLRB benefits by receiving a rebate from the contractor. The NLRB's policy covering the use of the contractor-issued travel charge card is outlined in Administrative Policy Circular 00-01¹ and Administrative Bulletin 01-20. Both of these documents are posted on the NLRB's Intranet.²

Below in a question and answer format is information regarding the use of the contractor-issued Government travel charge card. This document is intended to provide guidance on frequently asked questions about the proper use of the Government travel charge card and is not intended to change existing policies set forth in APC 00-01 and AB 01-20.

1. What is the required method of payment for official travel expenses?

The required method of payment for all official travel expenses is the Government contractor-issued travel charge card. Exceptions are noted below in # 7. The Agency's current contractor is Citibank. Applications for the Government travel charge card can be requested from the NLRB's Finance Branch and are also available online on the NLRB Intranet.

2. What is an official travel expense? Official travel is travel that is authorized and is solely in connection with business of the Government. Not all expenses incurred while in official travel status, however, are necessarily related to official travel. If an employee is in an official travel status and entitled to reimbursement, the incurred expense will be deemed an official travel expense. If an employee is in official travel status and not entitled to reimbursement, the incurred expense is not an official travel expense. ³

¹ The information in APC – 00-01 is currently being updated.

² Further information on the use of the travel charge card is available through the GSA Web Site at www.fss.gsa.gov/services/gsa-smartpay. Double click "programs". Select "travel on government business" and then select "travel charge card."

³ As indicated, this memorandum is intended to address the use of the government travel charge card for employees on official Agency business engaged in reimbursable travel. It does not address the use of the government credit card in situations where the use of the credit card for appropriate travel expenses may be acceptable but the costs are not reimbursable, such as when NLRBU representatives are traveling pursuant to their representational duties, or employees who have been authorized to attend training but the Agency is not reimbursing travel costs. If any employee should have questions about these particular issues, please contact your Office Manager.

3. What type of official travel expenses do I charge to my travel charge card? In nearly all instances, travelers must use the contractor-issued Government charge card for lodging, meals (where practical), car rental, gasoline purchases, and any other reimbursable casehandling related or travel-related charges.

4. Can I charge meals with the government travel card while I am away from the office investigating a case or cases? For an employee to be able to charge meals to his or her Government travel charge card, the employee must be away from his or her official duty station for 12 hours or more. For any amount of time less than 12 hours, the employee is not eligible for reimbursement of miscellaneous and incidental expenses (M&IE) and cannot use his or her travel charge card to pay for meals.⁴ **Thus, for instance, if a Board agent is out of the office investigating a case but within commuting distance of his/her official duty station and eats a meal, the meal is not a reimbursable expense and it would be inappropriate to charge it to the government travel credit card.**

5. May I use the Government contractor-issued travel charge card for personal use? No. The contractor-issued travel charge card can be used for **official travel expenses only**. In fact, there is a statement printed on the face of the charge card that states it is to be used "For Official Government Travel Only." The application also indicates that the card is to be used only for official government travel.

6. What are the consequences if I use my contractor-issued travel charge card for purposes other than those related to official travel? You could face appropriate disciplinary action by the NLRB, which could include reprimand, suspension, and even removal from Federal service.

7. Under what circumstances, while on official travel, is an employee not required to use his or her Government travel charge card? When a vendor does not accept the contractor-issued travel charge card or for those expenses incurred for which an employee might normally pay cash such as; parking; local transportation; taxis; tips; meals (when the use of the card is impractical, group meals, etc.); and phone calls. The Administrator of GSA has exempted these types of expenses from the mandatory use of the travel charge card.

⁴ There may be occasions where an employee reasonably believes that he or she will be away from his or her official duty station for more than 12 hours and will have used the Government travel charge card. Where there is a basis to conclude that an employee reasonable believed that he or she would be away from their duty station for more than 12 hours, the use of the Government travel charge card is permitted.

8. In those instances where it is not practical to use the Government travel charge card, how would I pay for those expenses? You can pay for those types of expenses by using the Government travel charge card to obtain a cash advance from an ATM machine. Each employee who is authorized cash withdrawals via the ATM has been issued a personal identification number (PIN) by the contractor. You may also use personal funds and seek reimbursement.

9. If I am eligible for cash withdrawals from an ATM machine, can I apply for a travel advance and/or a transportation allowance? No, unless there are extenuating circumstances justified and approved by the Finance Officer.

10. How often may I use my Government travel charge card for cash withdrawals? ATM cash withdrawal limits have been set up for every 30-day period. Cash withdrawals should not be obtained earlier than 5 working days prior to the date of departure and no later than the last day of travel. The cash advance obtained from the ATM machine serves the same purpose as the travel advance that the Agency used to issue to travelers, upon request, through the issuance of a check from the US Treasury Department. Like the travel advance that the Agency used to issue, cash advances from an ATM machine that are obtained by using the travel charge card are to be used for official travel expenses only and not for personal expenses. The amount of the cash advance should be reasonably related to the amount of the official travel expenses that cannot be paid with the contractor-issued Government travel card. The cash advance also should not exceed the amount authorized for the specified travel.

11. I have completed an application for a Government travel charge card, but I have not yet received my card. In connection with a case on which I am working, I am required to travel. How do I pay for my official travel expenses, if I don't have a contractor-issued travel charge card? An employee who has an application pending for a travel charge card is exempt from the mandatory use of the card. The employee should consult with his/her Office Manager who will contact the Finance Branch.

12. If I am authorized to use my POV to investigate a case, may I use the contractor-issued Government charge card to purchase gasoline for my vehicle while on official travel? Yes. You would claim the reimbursement for mileage on your travel voucher or request reimbursement by submitting Standard Form 1164, "Claim for Reimbursement for Expenditures on Official Business." However, when using your personal vehicle for official travel, the charge for gasoline is not claimed as a separate expense from the claim for mileage. The reimbursement for mileage is to pay for gasoline expenses as well as to defray the costs of repairs, insurance, depreciation, towage, and other speculative expenses that are not reimbursable expenses under the Federal Travel Regulations.

13. May I also do the same if I am using a GSA car? GSA has issued each office assigned a GSA car a gasoline charge card, and that card should be used to purchase gasoline for the GSA car. The card can be obtained from the Office Manager. However, there may be times when that card is not available for use and, in those instances, you may purchase gasoline for the GSA car using your contractor-issued travel charge card. You would claim the expense on your travel voucher or request reimbursement by submitting a Standard Form 1164.

14. Would any parking fees that I incur while investigating a case be covered as well? Yes, if you are investigating a case and entitled to reimbursement, and the parking garage or parking lot accepts charge cards in lieu of cash for payment, you may use the contractor-issued Government travel charge card to pay for any parking fees incurred. Again, you would claim the expense on your travel voucher or request reimbursement by submitting Standard Form 1164.

15. Can I use my contractor-issued Government travel charge card to pay for airline or train fares? It is generally expected that employees use the Agency's travel management center (TMC) to procure common carrier tickets (airline or train tickets). Normally, these costs are charged to a central account, which is paid by the Agency. In some circumstances where use of the TMC is not practicable, an employee may use his or her contractor-issued Government travel charge card directly with a contract carrier to pay for common carrier fares at the government rate. If there is a question as to whether a situation would permit you to use the travel charge card to purchase a common carrier ticket, you should contact the Finance Branch.

16. Who is the NLRB's TMC? Carlson Wagonlit Travel Website address and toll free number: www.cwgovernment.com/nlrb 1-800-787-6051.

17. There may be times when I may incur certain expenses, such as duplicating costs, during an investigation or a hearing. May I pay for those types of expenses with my contractor-issued Government travel charge card? Usually, any casehandling related expenses should be paid for by using the Visa Purchase Card. In the Field, the Office Managers have been issued a Visa Purchase Card and, in some Resident Offices, the Resident Officer. However, there may be times when arrangements cannot be made to pay for these types of expenses with the Visa Purchase card. In those situations, the contractor-issued Government travel charge card may be used to pay for those expenses. You should claim those expenses on your travel voucher or by submitting a Standard Form 1164.

18. I need to rent a room or obtain space in which to interview witnesses or conduct an election; can I use my contractor-issued Government travel charge card to pay for the room or space? Usually, any casehandling related expenses should be paid for by using the Visa Purchase

Card. In the Field, the Office Managers have been issued a Visa Purchase Card and, in some Resident Offices, the Resident Officer. Accordingly, where you are aware of the need to rent a room or space, you should make arrangements with the OM or Resident Officer so that they may use the Purchase Card to rent or obtain needed space. If the need for a room or space is sudden and unforeseen and it is not practical for you to contact the Office Manager or he or she is unable to obtain the authorization with the VISA Purchase card, the employee may use the contractor-issued government travel card to obtain the needed space. Reimbursement would be claimed on your travel voucher or by submitting a Standard Form 1164.

19. In order to ensure that I receive reimbursement in time to pay my bill, when should I submit my travel voucher for payment? Agency procedures require that you submit a completed and signed voucher(s) to an approving official within 5 workdays after completion of a specific, single trip; or after every 30 days of extended detail travel; or, for annual authorizations, at the end of each month. However, if an employee has incurred expenses at the beginning of a month that are reflected on his or her bill, the employee may submit a travel voucher more frequently than once a month or at the end of a detail.

20. Are purchases made using the contractor-issued Government travel charge card reviewed by the Agency? Yes, the Finance Branch receives a monthly detailed usage report from Citibank, which the Finance Officer reviews. Questionable transactions that arise in field offices are then forwarded to the Division of Operations-Management for further inquiry. The Finance Officer may send an e-mail message to any employee who appears to have used the card inappropriately. If no response is received, or the explanation the employee offers does not seem reasonable, the Finance Officer forwards the information to the employee's supervisor. It is expected that the employee's supervisor will then discuss the situation with the employee and get back to the Finance Officer regarding what action should be taken.

21. What should I do if I discover that I have inadvertently used my contractor-issued Government travel charge card to pay for an item that is not considered an official travel expense or use it to pay for certain business expenses and it may be questionable as to whether or not I should have used the travel charge card to pay for these items? If you discover that you have inadvertently used the contractor- issued Government travel charge card to pay for an item that is not an official travel expense, or you later question whether you should have used that card to pay for certain business expenses, you may want to contact the Finance Branch for guidance. Also, it is appropriate, if you are claiming reimbursement of a casehandling related expense on your travel voucher or on an SF-1164, to indicate on the voucher or the claim form that the item was paid for using the travel charge card in order to avoid inquiries over the appropriateness of using the contractor-issued Government travel card.

Not every specific situation regarding the use of the travel charge card can be addressed in these Q&A's but, if after reading them, you are still unsure under what circumstances you should use the Government contractor-issued travel charge card, you should contact Karl Rohrbaugh or Rita Beaudoin on (202) 273-4230 or at karl.rohrbaugh@nlrb.gov or rita.beaudoin@nlrb.gov.